

Hi,

Firstly, an update on the level of interest that exists for the project. We have received replies from almost 50% of residents / SMEs that were contacted initially and they are broken down as follows:

- 27 residents willing to pledge
- 6 SMEs willing to pledge
- 8 residents interested but undecided
- 6 residents not interested
- 1 unable to due to moving

We need vouchers totaling a minimum of £130,000 which includes the 30% contingency that Openreach (OR) require for the scheme to go ahead as a “Demand Led” project. If we consider only those who have said they are “willing” to pledge we would have vouchers worth £102,000, if all those who are “interested” were to pledge it would take the voucher value to a total of £126,000. We know from our previous communications with OR that this number may be sufficient for the project to proceed.

We have now received the final offer from OR for the project. The community portion of the cost for the work has remained the same at £99,999 so the voucher value required remains the same at £130,000. The letter also informs us that the cut-off date for applying for vouchers is 19 February, which came as a bit of a surprise that there is only 13 days to get the application for vouchers submitted.

Attached is a copy of a spreadsheet provided by OR to record the details of residents / SMEs that wish to pledge vouchers. If you wish to pledge could you please fill in one line of the sheet and return it as soon as possible so we can cut and paste your details into a single sheet so we don't have to type everyone's details into it manually. (Please read the rest of this message before doing so 😊).

Over the last five weeks we have been trying to get a response from OR to some questions relating to the project and there is one which is of potential significance to all of us.

The response from many who have replied have made reference to “at no cost to me for the fibre installation”. If all goes to plan that would be the case. You have been encouraged to read the DCMS and OR terms and conditions, links for which were put on the webpage. We have no idea who has and who has not read them. One of the questions asked of OR but as yet unanswered related to the validity period of the vouchers.

The DCMS terms and Conditions, para 1.7, state

*Your new connection must be installed within 12 months of the issue of a voucher. If your supplier is not able to deliver your new connection by this date then the voucher will expire and the grant will be no longer be available. We accept no liability for the costs of connections which are not delivered within 12 months of the offer of a voucher.*

The Openreach Pledge Terms and Conditions state

*If delivery is not achieved within the Build Completion Target Date and is not due to a matter beyond our reasonable control, rendering the RGC Voucher potentially ineligible, we will not seek to recover any costs from you. Save to the extent that such liability cannot be limited under law, our liability to you in respect of these Pledge Conditions shall extend solely to covering the cost of the RGC Voucher.*

This would imply that should Openreach not deliver the new fibre network within the allotted 12 month voucher validity period the vouchers become void and, unless it is simply a delay caused by OR in completing the installation, it is not clear who would then pay for the work. The implication would be that those who pledged vouchers would be expected to cover the cost. Whilst exceptional circumstances would have to occur to realise this risk (as we understand it currently), we felt that it was our duty to share this with you.

So what are we doing now?

- We are considering for ourselves whether, should this risk remain real (however small), we would pledge a voucher.
- We are contacting OR (again) to try to resolve this outstanding risk. It may be a situation that has never arisen for a specific technical reason.
- We are collating details of those who wish to pledge in order to finalise the total numbers (though rest assured if you provide details conditionally we will not pass them on to OR unless your conditions are met and we have confirmed this). No personal information has been passed by us to OR so far.

Please rest assured that the decision as to whether you go ahead rests entirely with you – no one can pledge a voucher on your behalf, you make the decision that is right for you without consideration of how others wish to respond. No one will know who says yes or no but we need to have a feel for numbers due to the short time available. It would be useful to hear your views, whether you feel positively or negatively, especially if you were previously interested but uncertain, as this could influence our position when communicating with OR in the next week or two.

Please contact us if you have any questions.